

"EXPERIENCING JEFF JOHNSON'S WORK IS LIKE GARDENING AT NIGHT IN THE BLACK, DELVY SOIL OF YOUR PSYCHE. HIS STRIPS CELEBRATE THE POETRY OF THE DARK AND THE DANK AND THE CRAWLY. NURTURE the DEVIL, HIS NEW COMIC, LETS YOU EXPLORE A MIDNIGHT WORLD WHERE EVERYTHING IS BLACK AND GLEAMING WITH SOMETHING WET AND STICKY... SOMETHING HIDEOUSLY BEAUTIFUL." ~ Richard Sala

# JEFF JOHNSON'S... **NURTURE the DEVIL!** MATURE READERS



invalid redeemer nods and counts the disengaged...

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# Letters & Got in the Mail



SEND ME STUFF AT: Po. Box 2932, Athens GA 30612-0932

• **NURTURE THE DEVIL** is immaculate. I love the way I feel like I'm reading inside your head when I'm right into it... Your drawings are so dreamy/nightmarish and they blend perfectly with the tale--there seems to be no compromising whatsoever in NTD--The length of the main story is the only thing that disappointed me. If I were you, I'd have filled up the whole comic with that story--take advantage of the format.

-Dave Cooper  
Ontario, Canada

~Dave is the artist responsible for **PRESSED TONGUE**, another fine Fantagraphics book, full of oozing, organic walls and shit-eating landlords. I recommend it highly! About *'The Garden'*--it's even shorter this time, but next issue will be devoted entirely to part three, so the whole story will amount to 50 pages.

• Jeff--Went to the store and found a copy of NTD #1. There was only one copy left, and I asked the manager how many he ordered. He chuckled nervously, 'Only three.' I reprimanded him, telling him that the only way the brainwashed masses are going to look beyond the superhero glut is if he and the other store owners put more of the good stuff like yours upon the shelves. He sort of shrunk away and hid behind the X-Men trading cards on the shelves.

Anyway, #1 looks really good. The very last scene in *'The Garden'* disturbed me tremendously because it corresponds almost verbatim to an early childhood memory... When I was about four or five, I remember waking up on my bedroom floor, a demon female-thing lying on top of me--not too differently from the way you depicted Paul in

his dilemma. This occurred three nights in a row. I could not tell anybody what happened because due to a hearing problem, I did not learn how to talk until I was six. Everybody thought I was crazy when I was a youth. After those three nights, the 'female demon-thing' never visited me again, though I sometimes caught slight glimpses of her watching me when I wandered in the woods past midnight.

I sincerely hope *Nurture* stays alive. Your comics are truthfully the best I've seen in a long time.

-Hans Rickheit  
Worcester, MA



~Hans has done some very promising minicomics and has a new work in progress.

• I used to be a born-again cursetian, but then I read your comic book, NTD, and I began to get these urges. They were strange, irresistible urges. I wanted to have kinky sex! I wanted to draw comics about bodily functions! I wanted to eat dead, burnt bodies--uh, I mean Kill! Kill! Kill! (Faster, Pussycat!) Ah, to nurture the devil! Such a noble pursuit! Almost as noble as using lots of exclamation points!!!

-Jack Welsh  
Morris Plains, NJ

~Jack draws a minicomic called *'Windigo'*, which is available for \$4.50 (plus postage!) from: Aargh! Comix, 105 Powdermill Rd., Morris Plains, NJ 07950-1419

• The theme of the 'dominant female in the house' is profound.

It lies at the root of Christianity, patriarchy, alcoholism, etc. (Along with other equally perverse familial gender flappoodles.) My family echoes your themes. Both my parents had fathers who died young, so they were raised by strong, determined women. Then, I was one of five children, where three were girls and my dear deceased brother was a flaming homosexual... No wonder I felt compelled to try on my sister's underwear as a kid!

-Steve LaFler  
Oakland, CA

~Steve is one of the co-conspirators responsible for *Buzzard*, a fine anthology book I've been proud to be a part of. Cat-Head Comics also publishes Steve's *BUGHOUSE*, the only example of insect-anthro-pomorphism I can think of!

Thanks for all the mail--I'm very erratic about answering, so I apologize if it takes a while, or if you're still waiting.

Vanessa McGee is a fellow Athens artist who's done a lot of great work recently, as glimpsed below:



She has several mini's available. Send \$3 to: Ballpen Comix, Po Box 545 Athens, GA 30603, or send postage for a catalog. You won't regret it! Bye for now...

NURTURE THE DEVIL #2, July 1994. NTD is published quarterly by Fantagraphics Books, Inc. and is copyright © 1994 Fantagraphics Books, Inc. All characters, stories, and art © 1994 Jeff Johnson. No part of this magazine may be used without written permission from Fantagraphics Books or Jeff Johnson. No similarity between any of the names, characters, persons, and institutions in NTD and any living or dead persons is intended (except for satirical intent) and any such similarity that may exist is purely coincidental. Any letters sent to NTD become the property of NTD and are assumed intended for publication. First printing: July 1994. Fantagraphics Books, 7563 Lake City Way NE, Seattle, WA 98115.

Editor: Gary Groth

Production: Pat Moriarity

Other things:  
other people



ONE DAY, IN THE LAND OF SQUALID  
INDULGENCE, A YOUNG BOY COMES  
ACROSS A GLOVE...



HE TRIES IT ON, AND  
FINDS HIS HAND HAS  
BEEN TRANSFORMED!



THE BOY RUNS CRYING  
TO HIS MOTHER, WHO  
SPEAKS, INEXPLICABLY, IN  
ANOTHER LANGUAGE OF  
SOOTHING TONES AND  
SCOLDING ASSUMPTIONS...



WHEN THE BOY WENT TO HIS FATHER,  
HE WAS BUSY AND DISINTERESTED,  
IMMERSED IN MULTIPLE SPORTING  
EVENTS...



SO HE RESIGNED HIMSELF TO DEALING  
WITH IT ALONE, UP IN HIS ROOM.



# BETSY PAYS HER LAST RESPECTS

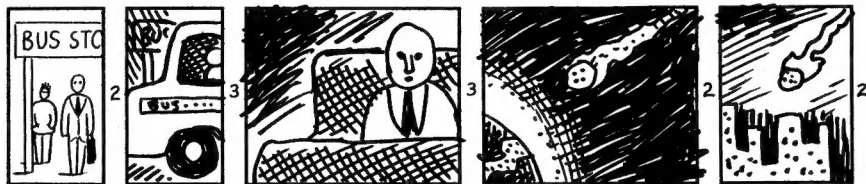
BY FEJ NOZNOJ

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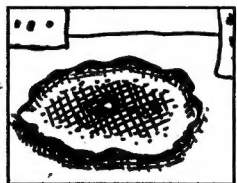
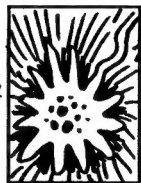
one

## INNOCENT BYSTANDERS





two



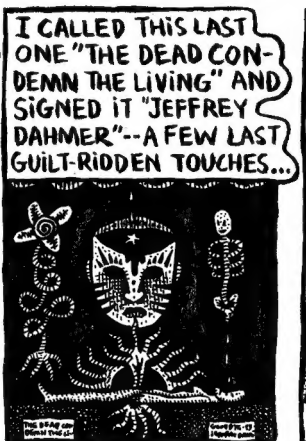
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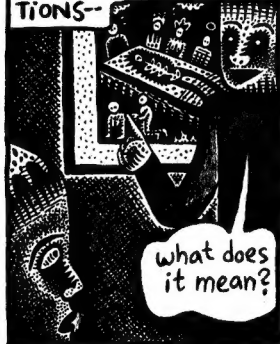
three







AS SOON AS THE SHOW STARTED, I WAS PLAGUED WITH DIFFICULT QUESTIONS--



WELL-INTENTIONED BUT IRRELEVANT AND UN-ANSWERABLE-- I DODGED UNCOMFORTABLY...



BUT THEY WOULDN'T LET UP! I WAS FORCE-FED BIZARRE SOCIO-POLITICAL INTERPRETATIONS...



I WAS FLATTERED BY THE AMOUNT OF CONVERSATION GENERATED, BUT UNPREPARED FOR SUCH AN ONSLAUGHT!



I FELT THAT I SHOULD HAVE DEVISED AN EASY ANSWER BEFOREHAND, SUCH AS THE ONE I USED TO EXPLAIN DEE'S ABSENCE--



THANKS TO DEVLIN T. FOR 'INTERPRETATION'

SO THAT, WHEN ASKED WHAT A CERTAIN PICTURE 'MEANT', I COULD JUST RATTLER OFF SOME QUICK NONSENSE AND BE DONE WITH IT,



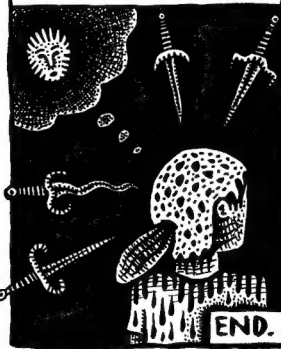
RATHER THAN STAMMER INDECISIVELY AND FEEL THE INCREASINGLY OPPRESSIVE WEIGHT OF MY OWN INABILITY TO COMMUNICATE.



EVENTUALLY, THE CROWD DISPERSED, AND THE PRESSURE WAS LIFTED...



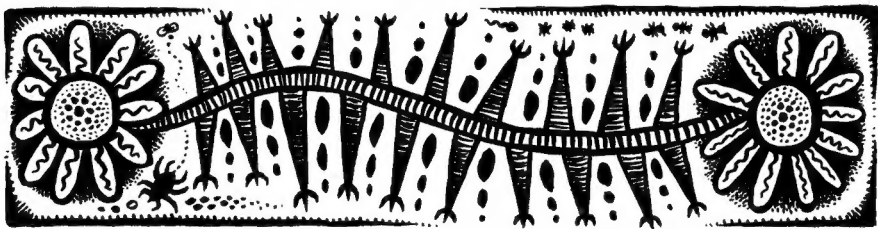
I ONLY FELT THE SADNESS OF HER ABSENCE WHEN I LEFT ALONE.







~(continued from last issue)... Sixteen





Hee  
Hee  
...

KEEPP  
WAPHTCHING,  
DAPHDDY--  
ASPH YOURPH  
PHVIRGINPH  
FPHLOWER  
ISPH DE-  
PHFILED  
...



URG  
ORK  
UNG  
ICK



WELL, YOU GUYS  
HAVE FUN! I'M  
GOING TO... OH...!  
USE THE BATHROOM!  
SEE YOU LATER,  
LILY...

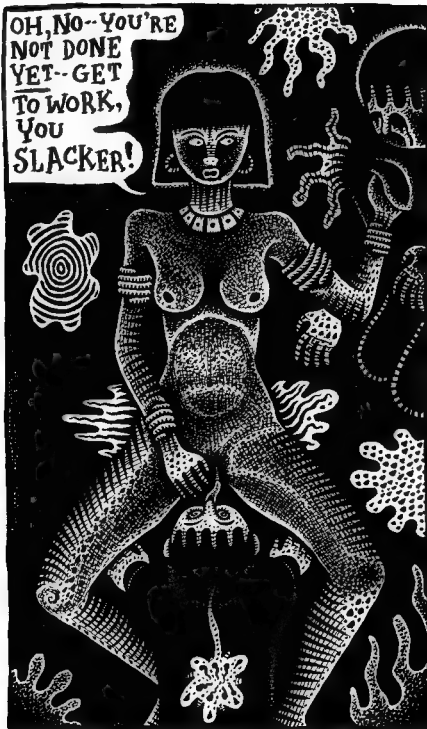


OH,  
MARCUS

seventeen



OH, NO-- YOU'RE  
NOT DONE  
YET-- GET  
TO WORK,  
YOU  
SLACKER!



eighteen

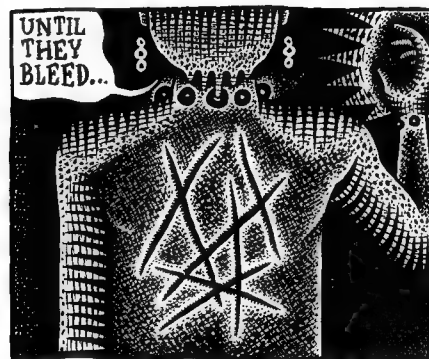




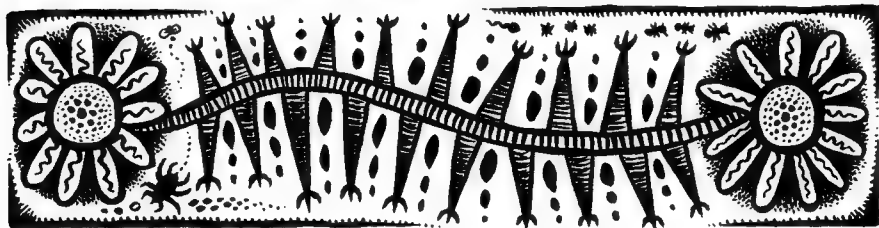


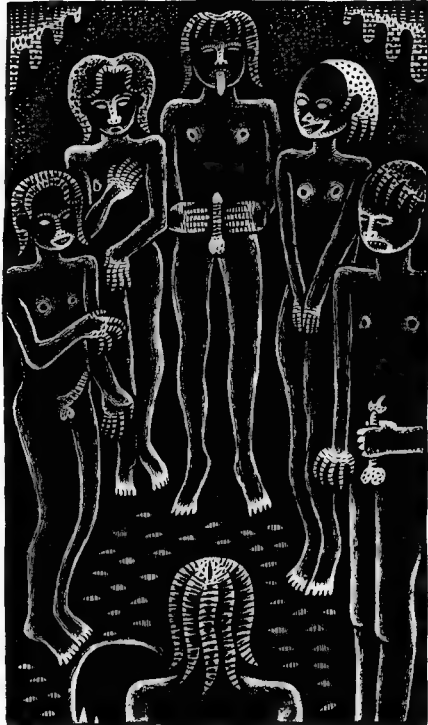
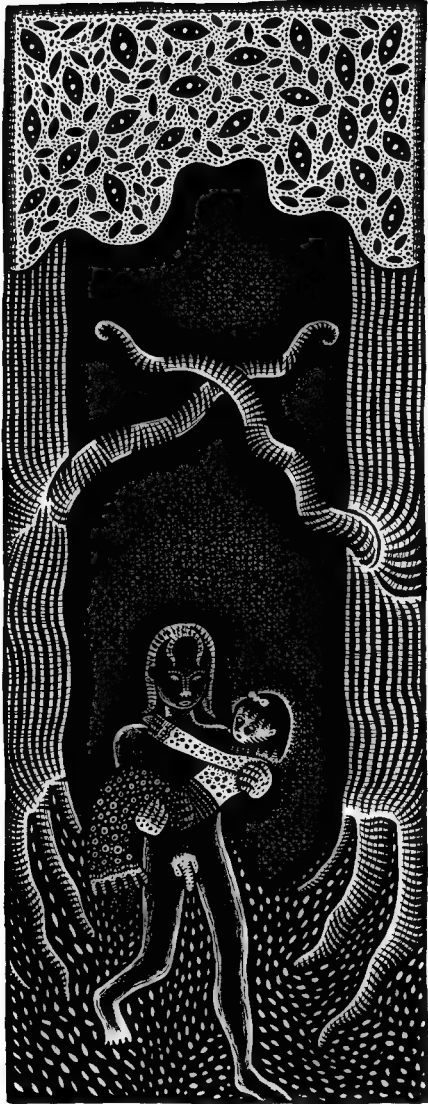
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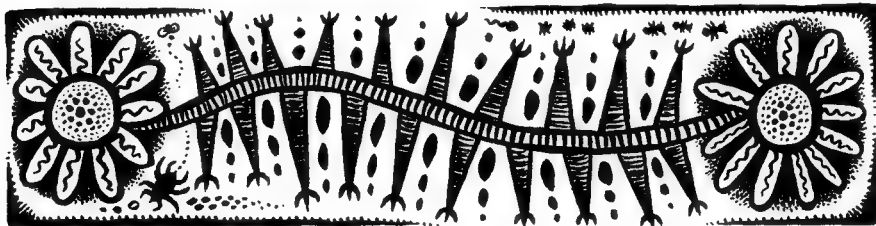


twenty

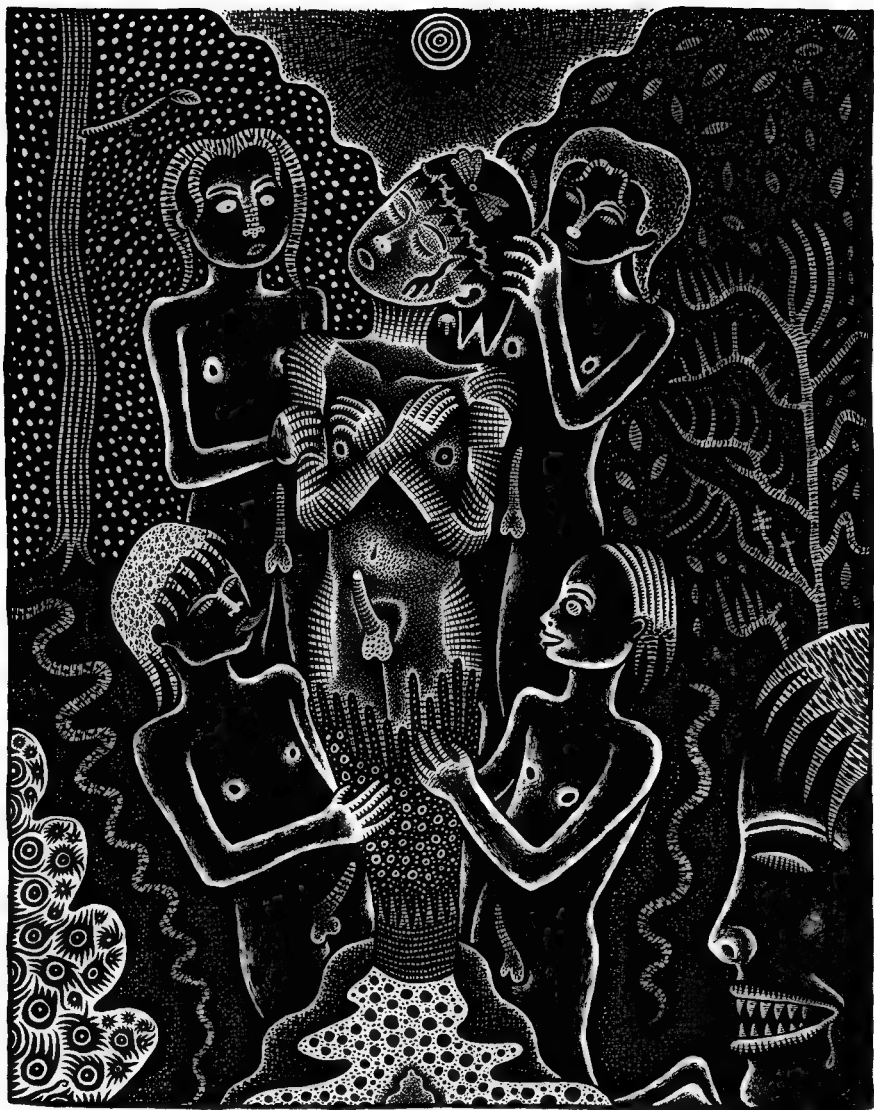




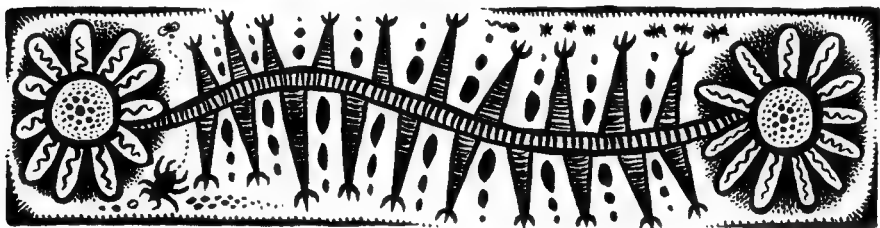
twenty-one







twenty-two



"TODAY I GUARD THESE  
ANDROGYNOUS WOODS...  
TONIGHT I BURN THIS  
SPLINTERED GENDER."

SO, YOU AND YOUR  
BROTHERS HAVE  
RAVISHED THE  
CHILD? YES, I  
CAN SEE THAT  
YOU HAVE...

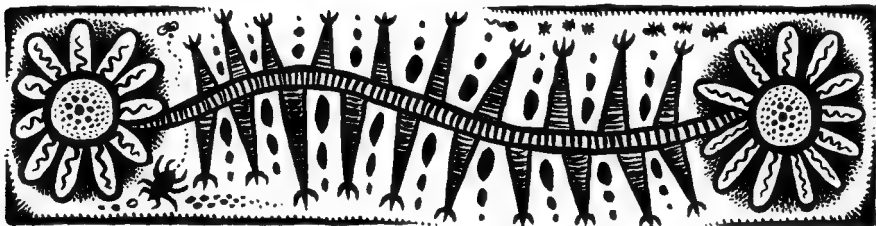
AND NOW THE SON  
SHALL BECOME A DAUGHTER.  
ROSALIND WILL BE SO  
SURPRISED...

TAKE HIM INSIDE  
AND PREPARE HIM.  
I'LL BE THERE  
SOON...

HIS FOUL FAMILY  
WILL FOLLOW,  
EVENTUALLY. EVEN  
THE FATHER, WHO WOULD  
RATHER FORGET THAT  
THIS PLACE EVEN  
EXISTS ON THE  
OUTSKIRTS OF  
HIS UNKEPT  
LAND.

EVEN HE CANNOT BUT  
OBEY THOSE BLOOD-TIES  
WHICH BIND ONE PERSON  
SLAVISHLY TO ANOTHER...  
I COUNT UPON THOSE  
STRANGLING  
UMBILICAL  
TENTACLES TO  
ENTANGLE THEM  
IN MY LITTLE  
TRAP.

twenty-three



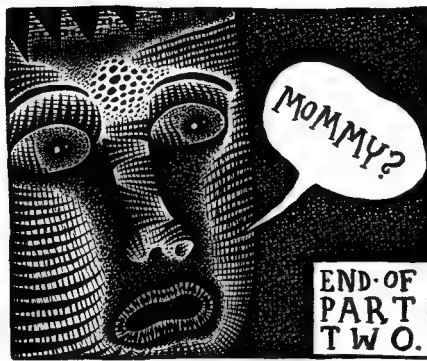
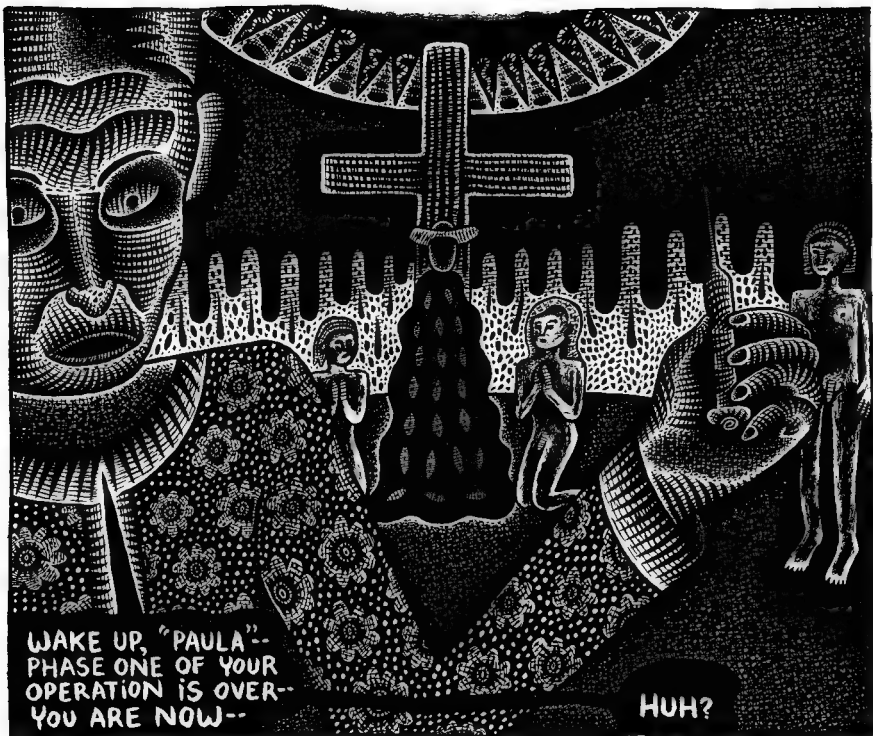
"LET HIM SLEEP NOW... AND BE TRANSFORMED."



twenty-four







~(concluded next issue)... twenty-five



# HOME SICK



by Jeff Johnson  
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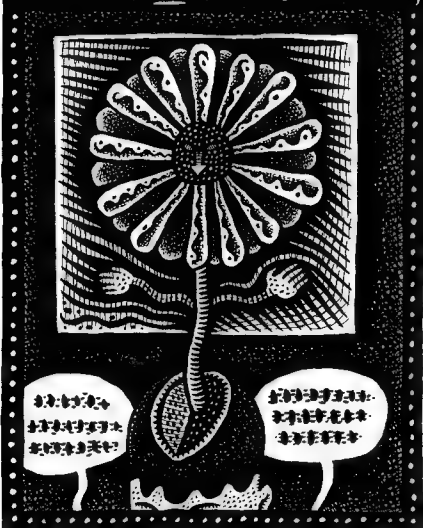
SOME PECULIAR DANCE BESIDE HIS FACE--  
THERE-- DRIPPING RIPELY IN THE DRAPES, A  
SUNSHINE FLUSH AS BLURRILY FAMILIAR  
AS HOME.



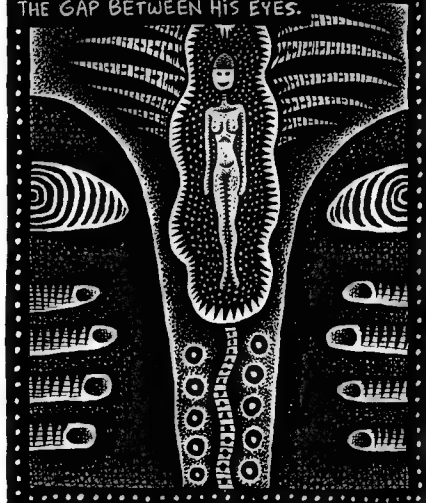
THE REDNESS SWELLS THE COURTROOM,  
PULSES WITH THE INSISTENCE OF APPETITE;  
DIMLY OUTLINES THE CLOUDY SHAPE OF A  
FALLEN TREE SHADOWED IN SIMPLICITY.



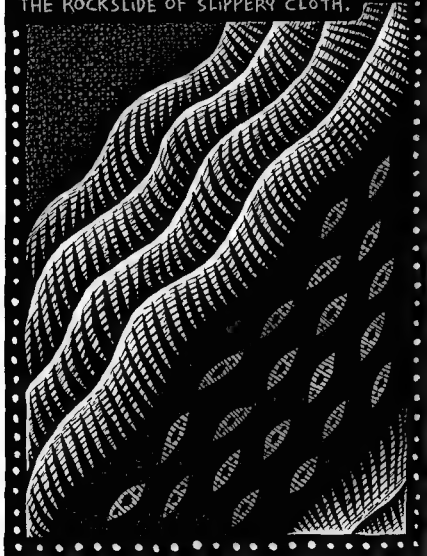
THE MORNING DIES, AND JUDGE MACKAY  
BISMAL FINDS HIS LUNGS OBSOLETE,  
OVERTAKEN BY NOONDAY SWOLLEN HEAT.  
IN HIS PLACE ANOTHER JUDGE RESIDES,  
ANOTHER MACKAY BISMAL WHO KNOWS  
INSTEAD THAT THIS IS HOW IT'S ALWAYS BEEN,



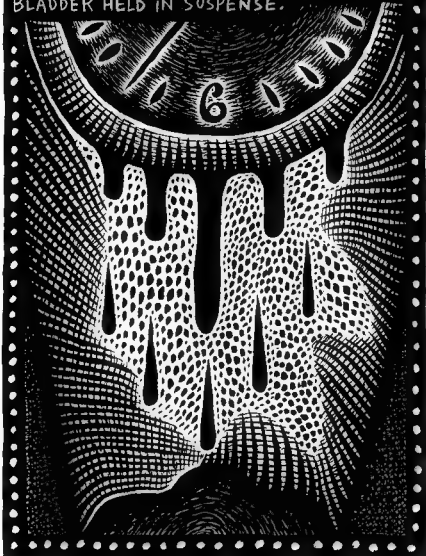
THAT TO LIVE IS TO INHALE THE PASSIONATE  
WHISPERINGS WHICH BUBBLE AND GURGLE  
WETLY FROM THE SWAMPISH THROAT WITHIN.  
THE TENSION OF ITS CORDS PRESSING  
STRONG FINGERS UPON HIS SKULL,  
SCULPTURING THE VISION OF HIS LUST'S  
AMBITION THROUGH THE FRAMEWORK OF  
THE GAP BETWEEN HIS EYES.



HE LISTENS INTENTLY TO THE RUSTLINGS IN THE DRAPES, NOTES EVERY SUBTLE SHIFT OF LIGHT AS PINKS AND ORANGES AND REDS SWIRL IN GRACEFUL CEREMONY ACROSS THE ROCKSLIDE OF SLIPPERY CLOTH.



THE CLOCK LEAKS MINUTES, EACH ACIDIC DROP CARVING NEW TERRITORY INTO THE CANYON OF HIS UNRELEASED ANXIETY-- THE WAITING HAS BECOME A SWEET TORTURE, A STEAMING BLADDER HELD IN SUSPENSE.



THROUGH WALLS OF MEANINGLESS WORDS HE HEARS THAT TICK-TOCK PITCH MANEUVER INTO UNBEARABLE DEPTHS AS POOLED WANT CORRODES OCEANIC NECESSITY. SUDDENLY HE IS HOME, BRIEFCASE AND KNEE POUNDING AN IMPATIENT DRUM ROLL THROUGH THE FRONT DOOR--



IMMEDIATELY THE STENCH ASSAULTS HIS FACE, WEAVING THICK TENDRILS INTO HIS HAIR, PAMPERING HIM, BECOMING HIS ENTIRE LIFE. THE DINING ROOM IS A DANCE HALL DECORATED FOR A CHILD'S BIRTHDAY, PAINTED IN A MURAL OF FLESHY VIOLENCE.





"BLOWOUT THE CANDLES," LYDIA LAUGHS, BUT THE WAX MASKS A BEAUTIFUL SURRENDER TO THE RAVAGES OF THE BLACKENED WICK, AND THE BLOATED HEAD RECOILS AT THE SPLASHING OF ITS OWN BLOOD.



"SO THIS IS HOW IT'S ALWAYS BEEN," PACKRAT BISMAL BREATHES THE SALTED LAND, REMEMBERS HIS HOARD... AS THE ROAD LINES UP BEFORE HIM AND THE ICE FORMS MONOLITHS TO HIS SIDE, A DISCOMFORTING SENSE OF DIRECTION SHOCKS THE SCENT INTO A STENCH.



THERE HE IS, THERE HE WAS, THERE HE WILL BE AGAIN: A DIZZING HEIGHT, AND LATE INTO INSOMNIA HE ROCKS THE SWEATY ROPE-BRIDGE, EXPLORING FACE-FIRST THE GENETICS OF MISERY.



IT TICKLES HIS TOES LEFT OUT IN THE COLD, BUT, DISJOINTED, HE HAS NOTHING TO UNRAVEL; RATHER, HE LEADS THE CALL FOR SYMMETRY, UNABLE TO CRACK THE TERROR OF FORGIVENESS.



END



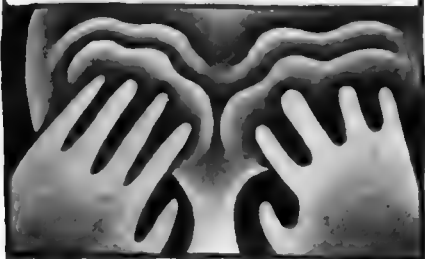
THE HEAD POKED OUT OF THE GROUND AND GLIDED TOWARDS ME AS SMOOTHLY AS A SHARK'S FIN SLICES THE SURFACE OF THE OCEAN.



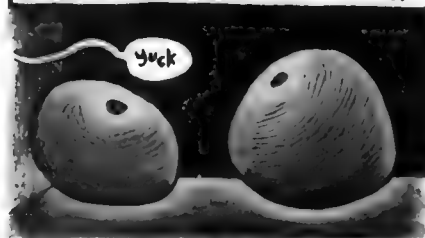
I REACHED OUT TO PUSH THE AWFUL THING AWAY, DREADING THE FEEL OF ANY WARM CRANIUM OTHER THAN MY OWN.



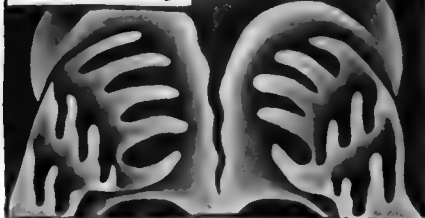
TO MY HORROR, THE FLESH OF ITS FOREHEAD, WHICH SHOULD'VE BEEN BONE-SOLID, SANK BENEATH MY TOUCH, AS SICKENINGLY SOFT AS AN INFANT'S UNFORMED SKULL OR, WORSE.



THE PULPY MUSH OF FORGOTTEN FRUIT GONE ROTTEN WITH NEGLECT, HAVING BEEN BOUGHT WITH HEALTHFUL INTENTIONS, BUT LEFT TO SPOIL WHILE WILL-SAPPING SUGARS OR SEDATIVE STARCHES ARE INSTEAD INGESTED.



GATHERING GUILT AS IT MULTIPLIED WITH BACTERIA, THE FRUITY HEAD PERSISTED YET IN ITS PRESSURE TOWARDS ME, AND I SQUEEZED UNTIL ITS JUICE RAN DOWN MY HANDS, DETERMINED THAT IT SHOULD MAKE NO FURTHER CONTACT WITH ME.



one



I AWOK, OF COURSE, DRENCHED IN SWEAT AND SAVORING A SOUR TASTE ON MY TONGUE-- REMEMBERING MY DREAM VIA THESE SENSATIONS AND MENTALLY RECORDING ITS GENERAL THRUST.



THE SANCTUARY OF SLEEP BECKONED ME BACK AGAIN, AND I YEARNED TO RETURN, BUT THE COLD DAMP CLOTH OF REALITY UNFORTUNATELY HELD ME FIXED.



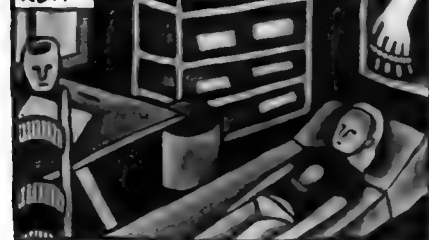
I BEGAN TO WONDER--HAD MY PORES WIDENED LIKE FLOOD-GATES TO RELEASE THIS TORRENT IN WHOSE WAKE I SO UNCOMFORTABLY LAY? THE PERVERSIVE WET WAS BEYOND ALL CAPACITY OF HUMAN PERSPIRATION...



AN ANCIENT ANXIETY UNSETTLED ME AS THE SMELL AND FEEL OF BEING BATHED IN MY OWN INTERNAL MOISTURE DROWNED ME IN MEMORY:



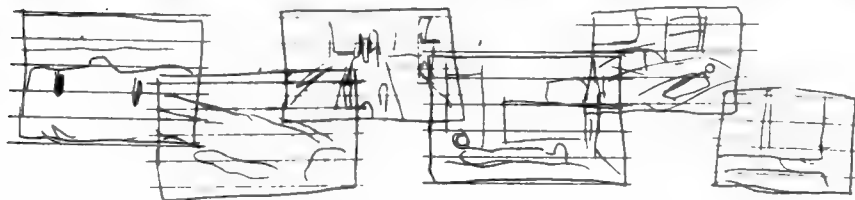
RETROSPECTIVE CURRENTS CLUNG AND PULLED IRRESISTABLY AT MY FEEBLY PADDLING LIMBS. I WAS AWASH IN REAWAKENED FEARS AND EMBARRASMENTS. I KNEW WHAT MUST COME NEXT:



THE WALK TO MY PARENTS' ROOM IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT, THE SOFT SQUISHING OF MY PYJAMAS AS I WOKE THEM FROM SLUMBER; HEARING THAT HALF-SUPPRESSED SIGH OF IMPATIENCE THAT DEMANDDED AN ANSWER, WITH INCREASING INTOLERANCE, TO THE RELEVANT QUESTION:



two



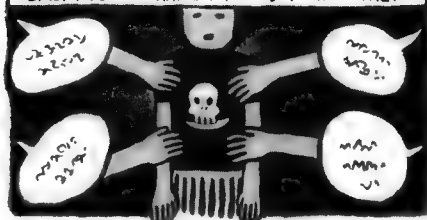
HAVING NEITHER INTERROGATOR NOR ANSWER, THIS PISS-SOAKED MORNING OF SMELLY ADULTHOOD, I CHOSE TO AVOID ANY SUCH LONG-TERM RELEVANCE THE INVOLUNTARY RELEASE OF MY BLADDER MIGHT HOLD,



MY OWN SUICIDAL INTAKE OF BOTTLED MADNESS ONLY ADDED TO MY ADDLED SENSES' EERIE DISTANCE AND DISORIENTATION WITHIN THIS DEN OF DANCING, OVER-EXCITED AMOEBAE.



CONSCIOUSNESS WAS NOW BUT AN UNDERWATER VIEW FROM THE BOTTOM OF A DEEP, DARK WELL INTO WHICH I HAD DRANK MYSELF. I PERCEIVED BUT DIMLY THE HANDS AND VOICES THAT RAISED ME UP AND AWAY FROM THE UNHOLY TRAMPLING OF SANITY'S CEMENT FLOOR THAT CONTINUED WITHOUT ME.



INSTEAD FOCUSING UPON THE PARTICULAR NIGHT IN QUESTION AND ITS GRUESOME, HAZY DETAILS. I RECALLED A CROWDED ROOM FILLED WITH MAD, BOUNCING SPECIMENS DRIVEN TO A FRENZY BY THE INSERTION OF MUSICAL STIMULATION INTO THEIR STERILE, PETRI-DISH WORLD.



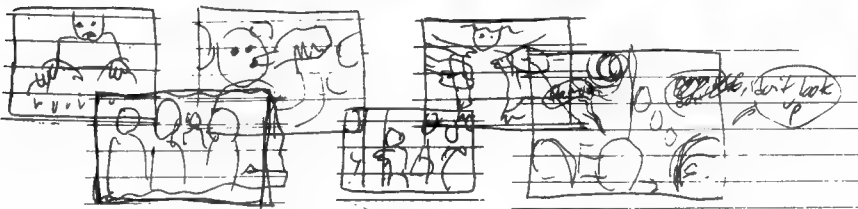
I FELT MYSELF GROWING NUMBER AS I STOOD, MY FEET PLANTED FIRMLY UPON THE FLOOR DESPITE THE SUDDEN CRAZE FOR MOVING THEM AS RAPIDLY AND RANDOMLY AS POSSIBLE. MY WORLD WENT DARK AND I SWOONED AGAINST THE SOLE COLUMN THAT HAD SUPPORTED ME 'TIL NOW;



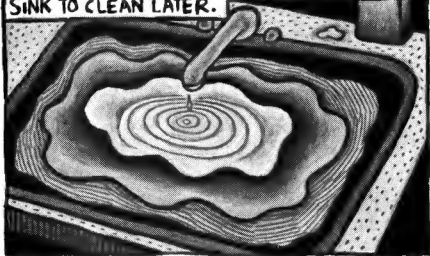
ONLY THE CRYSTAL-CLEAR COGNIZANCE OF PURE WATER COULD BRING ME BACK FROM INCOHERENCE. ITS COOL RATIONALITY CLEANSED MY SYSTEM SOMEWHAT AND REOPENED MY DRUNKEN, GUTTERPOOL EYES LONG ENOUGH TO STARE, DIZZILY, AT THE SPINNING, MANIACAL MOON, AND OFFER UP A FAINT PRAYER TO ITS LIFELESS LUNACY.



three



HAVING IDENTIFIED THE CULPRIT BEHIND THIS MISFORTUNE, I WAS EAGER AND RELIEVED TO FREE MYSELF FROM THE STINKING RAGS AND CONTENT TO LEAVE THEM SEQUESTERED IN THE SINK TO CLEAN LATER.



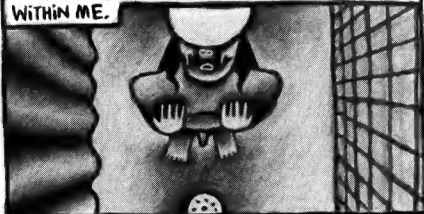
I WAS COMPELLED, HOWEVER, OUT OF AN OVERWHELMING CRAVING FOR COMFORT, TO CLEANSE MY FLESH OF THIS FOUL FLUID WITH MORE OF THAT DELICIOUS SUBSTANCE WHICH HAD SAVED MY MIND THE NIGHT BEFORE.



IT WASHED OVER ME IN STREAMS OF GLORIOUS PRESSURE, WAKENING AND INVIGORATING WHATEVER AREA IT TOUCHED. I CAME ALIVE AGAIN UNDER ITS MAGIC TENDRILS, WHICH PROBED AND EXPLORED LIKE FINGERS ALL THE ASPECTS OF MY PHYSICAL EXISTENCE.



THE SOOTHING OVERFLOW DRAINED MY MIND OF ANY ILL THOUGHT OR REGRETFUL RECOLLECTION-- I RESPONDED ONLY TO SENSUAL GRATIFICATION AS I BATHED IN STEAMY WARMTH, SUBMITTING INEVITABLY TO THE GROWING WHIRLPOOL OF SEXUAL INTROSPECTION THAT OPENED LIKE A VORTEX WITHIN ME.



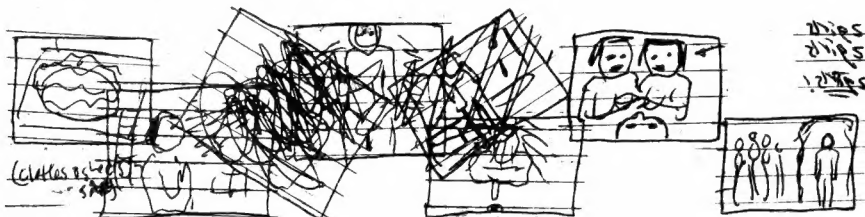
HELPLESS AS EVER TO THE INTOXICATING, ALL-OBTERATING ROAR, I FOLLOWED BLINDLY BEHIND MY SOULLESS DEMONESS, FEARING HER POWER AS SHE CUNNINGLY LED ME INTO A HOTOUSE HELL OF MY OWN DEVISING;



A WORLD, FORGED LONG AGO FROM THE FLAMES OF FEAR AND GUILT, IN WHICH I HAD NO SELF-- IN WHICH I PLAYED A DETACHED AND ISOLATED PRISONER AMIDST UNATTAINABLE CARNALITY, DAMNED NEVER TO PARTICIPATE IN THE JOYOUS, SINFUL REVELRY.



four

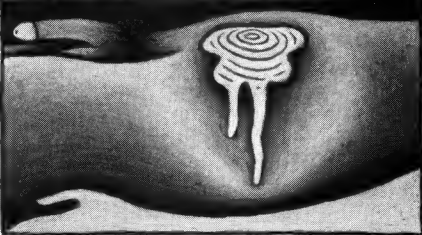




MY PRAYERS AND MINISTRATIONS TO THE DEMONESS BROUGHT ME ONCE MORE TO THE PORTAL OF SELF-NEGATION WHERE I SQUEEZED THROUGH LIKE TOOTHPASTE FROM A TUBE, AND JUST AS MESSY.



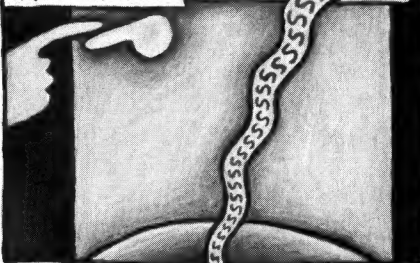
I RESTED IN THE AFTERGLOW OF MY SPIRITUAL DEGRADATION, WALLOWING IN THE FAMILIAR FEELING OF DISGUST AS THE MESS FROM WHICH MAY SPRING A MILLION HUMAN LIVES TRICKLED ITS TICKLING DROPLETS ROUND MY WAIST.



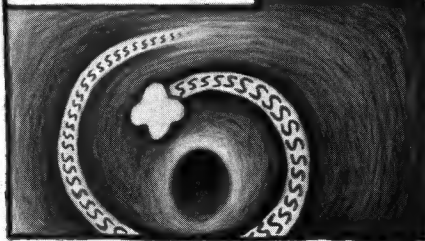
NOT WISHING MY ESSENCE ANY SORT OF EXISTENCE BEYOND MY OWN BODY, I SPRANG UP TO RID MYSELF OF THE POTENTIALLY LIFE-GIVING BURDEN. A TEAR OF TISSUE AND A FEW SWIFT WIPES PREPARED MY WASTED SEED FOR ITS SEWERWARD RIDE DOWN THE VORTEX EXPRESS.



A THROATY FLUSH GURGLED A GREETING FROM THE BOWELS OF HELL'S ONE-WAY ESOPHAGUS THROUGH WHICH MY BODY'S AMBASSADOR HAD GAINED PASSAGE.



WITHOUT EVEN TIME TO BRIEF IT ON THE PROPER PROTOCOL WITH WHICH TO PRESENT ITSELF TO MY DEMONESS' CLOVEN HUSBAND, I WATCHED IT TURN ABOUT CONFUSELY, WATERLOGGED AND LOST.



BEFORE THE SOGGY MASS WAS FINALLY SUCKED INTO THAT TOOTHLESS, PORCELAIN HELLHOLE--THE LONELY, WATERY GRAVE OF MY ABORTED OFFSPRING.



JEFF JOHNSON '94

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